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FOR NEA/ARP AND NEA/PPD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/29/2018

TAGS: [KPAO](#) [PREL](#) [BA](#)

SUBJECT: CONTRACT DISPUTE THREATENS TO DISRUPT RADIO SAWA
BROADCASTS IN BAHRAIN

REF: A. GRAAF / DOUGLAS E-MAIL DATED SEPTEMBER 12
[1](#)B. SEPT 25 LETTER FROM NAJEM TO CONNIFF
[1](#)C. SEPT 26 LETTER FROM TRIMBLE TO MINISTER OF
INFORMATION BUKAMAL

Classified By: CDA Christopher Henzel for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: The Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) and Bahrain's Information Ministry (MinInfo) have been unable to agree on a new contract for Radio Sawa broadcasts. Broadcasts for Bahrain could be suspended September 30. End summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Assistant Undersecretary for Foreign Media Sheikh Abdulla bin Ahmed Al Khalifa updated PAO September 28 on the latest turn in negotiations that have been underway for a year between BBG and MinInfo. Sheikh Abdulla said he believed Minister Jihad Bukamal and Bahrain Radio and Television Corporation CEO Ahmed Najem were serious when they informed BBG (ref B) that they would suspend Radio Sawa transmissions if no new contract was agreed on by September [1](#)30. (Note: Radio Sawa currently broadcasts from an FM relay transmitter on the grounds of the information ministry. The broadcasts can be heard in Bahrain and in some parts of Saudi Arabia's eastern province. There are no Radio Sawa staff in Bahrain.)

[1](#)3. (SBU) Under contract agreements from December 2005 to December 2007, BBG paid MinInfo USD 141,540 annually for broadcast services. Renewal of the contract has been under negotiation between MinInfo and the BBG since the most recent contract expired in December 2007. BBG has been dealing directly with the Ministry, informing post of exchanges. MinInfo has asserted throughout the negotiations that Bahrain, unlike its richer Gulf neighbors, can no longer afford to let BBG broadcast at concessional rates. BBG for its part has maintained that it would not be appropriate, in light of the US-Bahrain relationship, for BBG to pay full commercial rates, and has disputed the Bahraini claim that USD 500,000 per year is the going commercial rate. Radio Sawa has been broadcasting in Bahrain free of charge since December 2007 while negotiations continued.

[1](#)4. (SBU) On September 11, Middle East Broadcasting Network President Brian Conniff met with Minister of Information Jihad Hassan Bukamal (ref A) in Bahrain. The Minister gave the BBG until the end of September to decide whether it would agree to its asking price of USD 500,000 for the contract. Conniff replied that he would raise the issue with the board of the BBG and would provide the Ministry a response before the deadline.

[1](#)5. (SBU) On September 25, Post received an info copy of a fax from Najem to Conniff requesting a response from the BBG by September 30, and reiterating a warning that broadcasts would be suspended absent a new contract.

[1](#)6. (SBU) On September 26, Post received an e-mailed info copy

of a letter from the BBG to the Minister of Information (ref C), stating that the BBG would pay USD 300,000 to renew its contract, and would be willing to consider cost increases in future years. (Comment: While the letter called this a "new" offer, in early 2008 the BBG made an identical offer which was rejected by the Ministry. End comment.)

¶7. (C) While BBG has been negotiating directly with MinInfo for the past year, CDA expressed concern with the situation September 18 and 25 to MFA Under Secretary Abdulaziz bin Mubarak Al Khalifa. Al Khalifa informed CDA September 29 that post's concerns were being considered at senior levels of the GOB.

¶8. (C) Comment: Bukamal came to the Ministry with a reputation as a hard-nosed businessman determined to reverse the Ministry's reputation for financial mismanagement. In post's view, he means what he says when he argues that Bahrain should not offer concessional rates like its richer Gulf neighbors. End comment.

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